



September 19, 2016

Senate Judiciary Committee
c/o Senate Judiciary Clerk
Michigan State Senate
PO Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

RE: 5-foot passing and vulnerable roadway user bills

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am a member of the team that organizes and produces the Black Bear Gran Fondo, a Grayling Rotary Club event. On behalf of the Grayling Rotary Club, we support the bicycle safety package before the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 20. We strongly urge you to vote in favor SB1029, SB1030, SB1076, SB1077, and SB1078. Collectively, these bills protect vulnerable roadway users, create clear standards for how to safely pass a bicyclist, and improve driver's education in Michigan to put a great emphasis on bicycle safety.

The Grayling Rotary Club has just completed our 16th year managing and producing the Black Bear Gran Fondo, a bicycling event that is our largest fund raiser and has attracted up to 400 registered cyclists. In 2016, the Black Bear Gran Fondo consisted of two loops in 2016, 100 miles and 57 miles that traversed Crawford, Roscommon and Oscoda counties. Northern Michigan has a limited number of paved roads to create routes for this type of event and although we do our best to avoid state highways, at times it cannot be avoided and those are some of the most dangerous sections of the rides for our participants. Bicycle safety is our greatest concern and we do everything possible to reduce risk to the cyclists. This year we had over 70 volunteers serving as corner marshalls and there are still some places that our cyclists encounter safety concerns. Participant safety is an ongoing conversation as we plan each year's event and we were all saddened by the many Michigan news stories published this summer regarding cyclists who unnecessarily lost their lives in road accidents.

Michigan lags behind other states in protecting bicyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users. In 2015 bicycle fatalities in Michigan increased a startling 57%. Sadly, 2016 is on track to be even more tragic, with 18 bicycle fatalities as of August 31. By supporting these bills, this committee is in the unique position to prevent future senseless tragedies.

That starts by improving driver's education. Michigan does not spend adequate time teaching new drivers about bicyclist's rights and how to safely share the road. As Complete Streets policies continue to grow in popularity, more and more bicycle lanes and other dedicated bicycle infrastructure are being installed in communities across Michigan. This makes it more important than ever to educate drivers on how to safely interact with cyclists on our changing roads. Failing to include bicycle safety in Michigan's drivers education curriculum endangers the lives of all roadway users. Dedicating a specific amount of time will help to alleviate confusion among motorists and reduce common crashes.

One of the most common types of bicycle/auto crashes involve collisions where a motor vehicle strikes a bicyclist while attempting to pass when traveling in the same direction. The Office of Highway Safety and Planning reports that 55% of bicyclists involved in crashes in 2015 were “going straight ahead” prior to the crash. Creating clearer guidelines for how motorists should interact with cyclists on the roads is essential. A five feet passing standard is the minimum distance sufficient to ensure safe passing and to help prevent a driver from striking a cyclist if the cyclist were to fall in the travel lane. Michigan is one of only eleven states without a law specifically requiring motorists to pass bicyclists safely.

Lastly, Michigan law already has enhanced penalties for drivers who injure or kill construction workers, children in designated school zones, and operators of slow-moving farm vehicles. It is time to recognize bicyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users as inherently vulnerable roadway users and give them similar protections. Pedestrians and bicyclists made up 21% of all roadway fatalities in 2015, a disproportionately high number considering they only accounted for 1.42% of all traffic crashes. Enhanced penalties will further increase the standard of care for drivers around non-motorized roadway users.

The Grayling Rotary Club is encouraged at the extensive public support for these bills and the wide bipartisan support among the legislature. Thank you in advance for your leadership in supporting these bills that will improve cyclist safety on Michigan roadways.

Sincerely,

Stephanie J. Riemer
Grayling Rotary Club
Board member and
Black Bear Gran Fondo team member
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